4 PART MINI-SERIES

DON McGREGOR GENE COLAN

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NATHANIEL DUSK™

PRIVATE INVESTIGATOR II

APPLE PEDDLERS DIE AT NOON—PART 1

This one is for my mother-in-law, **Joan Childers**,
who makes our lives brighter by her presence
even when she's far away.

And who never in the world thought she would
have a comic book dedicated to her.

And for
The Private Eye Writers of America,
who have helped the P.I. survive
all those whacks on the cranium
and fusillades of bullets.

Don McGregor

"Of all the possible values of human society,
one and only one is the truly sovereign,
truly universal, truly sound, truly and completely
acceptable goal of man in America.
That goal is money, and let there be no
sour grapes about it from the losers."

C. Wright Mills,
The Power Elite

NATHANIEL DUSK: APPLE PEDDLERS DIE AT NOON
DON Mc GREGOR
CREATOR / WRITER / EDITOR
GENE COLAN
ARTIST
JOHN COSTANZA
LETTERER
TOM ZILKO
COLORIST
FRIDAY- JUNE 15, 1934
CENTRAL PARK
THE PROBLEM IS, THERE ARE A LOT OF QUESTIONS.
OR MAYBE THAT ISN'T THE REAL PROBLEM.
MAYBE, IT'S THAT THE ANSWERS TO THE QUESTIONS ARE OFTEN TREACHEROUS, OR WORSE, CAPRICIOUS.

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THAT IS ONE OF THE FIRST TRUTHS YOU LEARN WHEN YOU MAKE YOUR DAILY BREAD (SCANT AS IT MAY BE) BY WORKING AS A DETECTIVE.
THE JUNE HEAT WAS LIKE A MASHER HOLDING TIGHT WITH A KNIFE BLADE TO YOUR THROAT.
IT WOULDN'T LET GO.
SHIRTS CLUNG TO BACKS, DARK STAINS SPREAD UNDER ARM-PITS...
CHUNK
...B.V.D.'S CREPT LIKE SODDEN NOOSES UP CROTCHES.
LT. MURRAY ABRAHAMS LOOKED AS IF HIS SHORTS WERE STRANGLING HIM.
THANKS FOR CALLING ME, MURRAY.
AFTER ALL THE HOOFING AROUND YOU DID, TRYING TO SCOUT HER UP, I FIGURED YOU HAD SOME RIGHT TO BE HERE.
IT WOULD HAVE BEEN AN UNCOMFORTABLE DAY, EVEN FOR A PICNIC.
WE WEREN'T HERE FOR A PICNIC.
YOU SURE THOSE TWO ARE TELLING THE TRUTH?
WOULD YOU ADMIT TO DOING SOMETHING THIS TERRIBLE...
...IF YOU HADN'T DONE IT?

I'VE SEEN A LOT OF PEOPLE DO THINGS I WOULDN'T DO.
YOU DON'T TELL ME.
PHEW!
THIS HUMIDITY'S A KILLER, ISN'T IT?
YEAH.
BECKY'S EXPECTING.
OH, YEH?
CONGRATULATIONS.
WE WANT A DAUGHTER ... THOUGH, I LOOK AT THOSE TWO, KIND OF MAKES ME WONDER WHY A BIT.
THEY GIVE ME THE WILLIES.
HOW MUCH OF THE $25,000 SMACKERS DID THEY HAVE LEFT?
THEY HAD ABOUT FOUR WEEKS TO SPREAD IT AROUND, BUT THEY'VE BEEN LYING LOW, SO MOST OF IT'S STILL THERE.

I SPENT THREE WEEKS LOOKING FOR HER. I STARTED SEEING HER FACE IN MY SLEEP.
I KNEW WHAT THE CHANCES WERE WHEN THE KIDNAPPERS DIDN'T TURN HER OVER TO HER FOLKS AFTER THEY HAD PAID THE RANSOM, BUT...
HMPH. I THOUGHT I'D GET A VOICE TO MATCH THE FACE IN THE PICTURE.
THWD
ONE OF THE SHOVELS HIT SOMETHING SOFT, MADE A DULL SOUND.
THE DAY WENT SILENT.
THE DIGGERS LOOKED AT EACH OTHER, AS IF RELUCTANT TO UNCOVER WHAT THEY HAD BEEN DIGGING FOR.
PLEASE, GOD IN HEAVEN, DON'T LET IT BE!
I WONDERED WHAT I WAS DOING HERE. I WONDERED IF IT WAS WORTH $500.00 PUTTING A SIGHT LIKE THIS INTO MY LIFE--
--A SIGHT THAT WOULD STAY WITH ME, LIKE JOYCE LYING TWISTED AND BLOODIED ON RUMPLED BEDSHEETS--
--OR MY FATHER, TRYING TO COUGH HIS LUNGS UP, DYING FROM THE INFLUENZA PLAGUE OF 1918.
ELIZABETH.
LIZZIE.
SHE WAS EIGHT YEARS OLD IN FEBRUARY. SHE HAD BEEN KIDNAPPED IN MAY.
HER FACE WAS THE COLOR OF CHALK AND DIRT.

HER PARENTS HAD OLD MONEY AND HAD BEEN WISE ENOUGH TO LISTEN TO THE FINANCIERS WHO HAD PREDICTED BLACK WEDNESDAY, THE WALL ST. CRASH. THEY HAD CONVERTED MUCH OF THEIR ASSETS INTO GOLD.
WHEN THE RANSOM MONEY WAS PICKED UP AND LIZZIE WASN'T RETURNED, THESE RESERVED PEOPLE PANICKED. MONEY HADN'T BOUGHT EVERYTHING.
ALL THE TIME I WAS SHOWING LIZZIE'S PICTURE AROUND, ASKING ABOUT HER, SHE WAS LYING IN THE DARK EARTH, DEAD.
THEY SAID THEY KILLED HER THE SECOND DAY.
THE COUPLE LOOKED ANGRY, AS IF THEY HAD BEEN CHEATED.
SHE'S RIGHT WHERE I SAID, RIGHT?
THEY HAD HAD THEIR MOMENT. THEY HAD GOTTEN BACK AT THE PEOPLE WITH THE BIG MONEY, WITH THE SMELLS, AND THAT SEEMED TO JUSTIFY ANYTHING THEY HAD DONE.
EVEN THOUGH IT WAS DARK WHEN WE BURIED HER, I LED YOU STRAIGHT HERE. YOU CLEAR THE DIRT OUT OF HER EYES, YOU'LL SEE, IT'S REALLY HER.
SHUT UP!
YOU CRAZY SON-OF-A-BITCH!
THE DIGGER HAD A FATHER'S EYES, FILLED WITH PAIN AND RAGE.

THE YOUNG MAN STARTED RANTING LIKE SOME LOQUACIOUS LUNATIC RAILING AGAINST THE UNFAIRNESS OF LIFE.
YOU DON'T CALL ME THAT! I AIN'T LETTIN' NOBODY CALL ME NAMES NO MORE!
THE FIGURES MOVED CLUMSILY BUT VIOLENTLY.
A YANK, SHOVE, TUMBLE, THREE SECONDS OF CLOWNS PLAYING, ALL LIT BY HARSH JUNE SUNLIGHT--
--EXCEPT THEY WEREN'T CLOWNS AND NO ONE WAS PLAYING.
HE WENT LEAPING OVER LIZZIE'S GRAVE, LOOSE-LIMBED AND GANGLY, LIKE A TEENAGER WHO HADN'T YET DISCOVERED COORDINATION.
THERE WAS A TRIUMPHANT LOOK ON HIS FACE, AS IF HE HAD A DREAM OF FREEDOM GAINED THROUGH HERCULEAN EFFORT.
I TRIPPED HIS GODDAMNED DREAM OUT FROM UNDER HIM.
I HOPED THE DREAM HIT HARD.

HIS MOVEMENTS WERE PROPELLED BY HIGH-ENERGY DESPERATION. I'D HAVE BEEN FINE IF IT WEREN'T FOR THE HARD METAL EDGE OF THE HANDCUFFS.
MY SKIN TORE EASILY, LIKE CHEAP TOILET PAPER AFTER A YANK. BLOOD SEEPED INTO MY EYE.
I THREW THE PUNCH HARD AND FAST, A BLOOD-AND-ANGER MOTIVATED PUNCH, NOT FORM PERFECT, BUT POWERFUL IN INTENT.
JESUS! DON'T LET ME LOSE THE EYE!
I HIT SQUARE ON HIS NOSE AND HEARD THE SATISFYING CRACK OF BREAKING BONES--
--SAW THE QUICK GUSH OF BLOOD-SPRAY BURST INTO THE AFTERNOON AIR.

HE HAD A STRANGE SMIRK ON HIS BLOODIED FACE, AS IF MY HITTING HIM HAD CONVINCED HIM HE WAS RIGHT--
-- HAD PERPETUATED HIS DELUSION THAT HE WAS THE VICTIM, NOT LITTLE LIZZIE'S VICTIMIZER.
LEAVE HIM ALONE, YOU GODDAMNED BULLS! IT WASN'T HIM KILLED THE KID!
IT WAS ME!
THE KID WAS WHINING ALL THE TIME! IT WAS DRIVING ME OFF MY NUT!
WHAT THE HELL DID SHE HAVE TO WHINE ABOUT?
SHE HAD EVERYTHING, DIDN'T SHE? BUT ALL THE TIME SNUFFLING, WE WAS THE ONES HAD A RIGHT TO CRY. WE DIDN'T HAVE NOTHING!
SO I SHUT HER UP!
I THROTTLED HER!
LEAST THAT WAY WE WOULDN'T HAVE TO LISTEN TO HER CARRYING ON ALL DAY 'TIL HER WISH HAT OLD MAN PAID OFF!

THE COUPLE WERE SUITED FOR EACH OTHER, FED EACH OTHER'S MISERY. THEY FELT THEY HAD BEEN CHEATED ALL THEIR LIVES.
THEY HAD BEEN BORN POOR, LIVING WITH HAND-ME-DOWNS AND SPARSE MEALS--
--BUT THEY ALSO KNEW THERE WERE OTHERS WHO LIVED IN LUXURY--
--AND THEY IMAGINED BATHTUBS FILLED WITH GIN AND [redacted] TO TAKE THE PAIN OUT OF LIFE.
COME ON, YOU--ON YOUR FEET!
IT WAS ONLY AN ACT OF BIRTH THAT DENIED THEM; THEY DESERVED TO BE WITH THE ELITE.
IT WAS THEIR RIGHT TO GRAB THE BRASS RING AHARD, EVEN IF AN ACT OF DEATH WAS REQUIRED TO REACH IT.
THE WEISENHEIMER FELL DOWN, LT. ABRAHAMS. HAD A NASTY FALL. HURT HIMSELF, HE DID.
YOU DON'T TELL ME?
MAKE SURE HE DON'T FALL DOWN ANY MORE STEPS.

ABRAHAMS AND I HAD GONE TO SEE LIZZIE'S PARENTS.

I HAD CHANGED INTO MY GRAY SUIT, THE ONE THAT HID THE DIRT AND MADE ME FEEL LIKE A MORTICIAN.

THE SUIT WAS TOO HOT FOR JUNE, BUT IT WAS THE RIGHT COLOR FOR TELLING PARENTS THEIR CHILD WAS DEAD.

THE COFFEE STAND ON LEXINGTON AND 86TH ST WAS PATTERNED AFTER A SWISS/GERMAN CHALET

THE SLOPING EAVES WERE SUPPOSED TO REMIND THE GERMAN-TOWN IMMIGRANTS OF THEIR HOMELAND.

THE PLACE DIDN'T FOOL ANYBODY IT DIDN'T HAVE A VIEW OF THE ALPS

WE TALKED AROUND LIZZIE.

THERE WAS NOTHING THAT COULD BE SAID THAT WOULD MAKE IT BETTER.

BECKY'S SCARED

WHAT DO YOU MEAN? SCARED? ABOUT WHAT?

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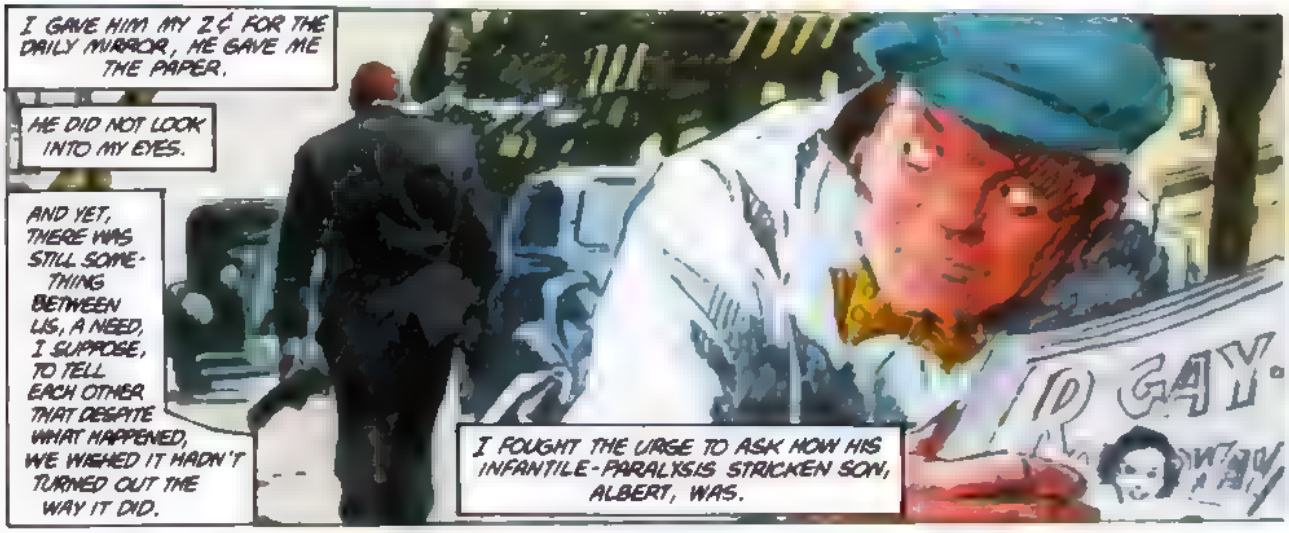
ABOUT US TRYING TO HAVE THIS KID EVER SINCE SHE MISCARRIED THREE YEARS BACK, THIS FEAR'S BEEN ON HER MIND.
SHE'S WORRIED IT'LL HAPPEN AGAIN IT KEEPS HER AWAKE AT NIGHT
I TELL HER NOT TO WORRY ABOUT IT. SHE GIVES ME A LOOK THAT SAYS "WHAT DO YOU KNOW ABOUT IT? YOU EVER FEEL LIKE DIE INSIDE YOU?"
WHAT DO YOU SAY TO THAT?
I HAVEN'T THE FAINTEST IDEA.
I DON'T THINK I'LL TELL HER WHAT WE SAW TODAY.
I WOULDN'T
SO
WHO DO YOU THINK WILL WIN THE FIGHT? BAER OR CARNERA?
THAT'S THE QUESTION OF THE DAY, ISN'T IT?
I GUESS WE'LL KNOW BY TOMORROW.
YEAH.
'CEPT FOR LIZZIE'S PARENTS
OUTCOME WON'T MEAN MUCH TO THEM
SEE YOU LATER, NATE

OSCAR FLAM STILL HAD HIS NEWSPAPER STAND OUTSIDE THE BUILDINGS WHERE MY OFFICE WAS LOCATED IN THE EAST 80S.
CIGARS
MALTED MILK 10¢
CONE 5¢

IT WAS ODD, BUT FOR SOME REASON I STILL BOUGHT MY PAPER FROM OSCAR, EVEN THOUGH HE HAD ONCE WEASELED TO SOME RODMEN ABOUT MY WHEREABOUTS.
CONE

EXTORTIONISTS HAD THREATENED TO RUIN HIS BUSINESS. HIS BUSINESS WAS SELLING PAPERS AND LURID ADVENTURE AND GRISLY MYSTERIES, NOT LIFTING UP ROCKS TO SEE WHAT SCURRIES BENEATH THEM, THE WAY MINE WAS
DAILY MIRROR
BAER-CARNERA

WHEN YOU TURN ROCKS OVER, YOU EXPECT THAT SOMETIMES YOU ARE GOING TO SEE THINGS THAT YOU DON'T LIKE.
WE DID NOT TALK TO EACH OTHER
NO APOLOGIES.
NO EXCUSES


I GAVE HIM MY 2¢ FOR THE DAILY MIRROR, HE GAVE ME THE PAPER.
HE DID NOT LOOK INTO MY EYES.
AND YET, THERE WAS STILL SOMETHING BETWEEN US, A NEED, I SUPPOSE, TO TELL EACH OTHER THAT DESPITE WHAT HAPPENED, WE WISHED IT HADN'T TURNED OUT THE WAY IT DID.
I FOUGHT THE URGE TO ASK HOW HIS INFANTILE-PARALYSIS STRICKEN SON, ALBERT, WAS.
GAY

FREDDIE BICKENHACKER HAD PLAYED THE BUCKERS ON WALL ST.

HE HAD BEEN A LAND SPECULATOR

ON PAPER HE HAD BEEN A MILLIONAIRE, UNTIL THE CRASH TOOK IT ALL AND LEFT HIM IN DEBT.

HE SHINED SHOES LIKE HE WAS BORN TO IT, LOVED THE SPIT AND POLISH, LOVED A JOB WELL DONE.

HE LIKED TALKING TO PEOPLE.

HOW'S THE DAY TREATING YOU, NATE?

I'VE HAD BETTER.

YEAH WELL, A SHOESHINE 'LL FIX YOU RIGHT UP. MAKE YOU SEE THE DAY IN A NEW LIGHT.

I DOUBT THAT

FWIP

GOT SOME HOT DAYS COMING, HUH?

YEAH

FWIP

EVERYBODY'S TAKING ODDS ON THE BAER/CARNERA FIGHT, BUT NOT ME.

FWIPP

NOW, WHAT I AM GIVING THOUGHT TO TAKING ODDS ON IS WHETHER THE MAGISTRATE IS GONNA THROW THOSE GUYS..

...WHO GO TO COMEY ISLAND..

...BARE-CHESTED..

..IF HE'LL THROW THEM INTO THE CLINKER.

SWIP

DON'T KNOW IF YOU KNOW THIS OR NOT, BUT UNDER THE LAW, THE JUDGE CAN GIVE THEM FIVE DAYS FOR INDECENT EXPOSURE.

PLUS A FINE.

FWUP

ZWIP

I FIGURE IT COULD GO EITHER WAY IF I KNEW HOW JUDGE O'DYER WAS THINKING, I COULD MAKE A BUNDLE.

BUT I'M BETTING HE'S GOING TO HAVE TO LET THESE GUYS GO. THERE'S GOING TO BE TOO MANY JOES WEARING THESE NEW-FANGLED TOPLESS SWIMSUITS.

WHAT'S O'DYER GONNA DO? THROW A THOUSAND GUYS INTO THE SLAMMER FOR SHOWING THEIR NIPPLES?

HELL, THEY WOULDN'T EVEN HAVE ROOM FOR DILLINGER, IF THEY EVER CAUGHT HIM, WHICH THEY PROBABLY NEVER WILL.

I TRIED TO THINK ONLY ABOUT FREDDIE'S CHATTER AS I CLIMBED THE STEPS TO MY THIRD FLOOR OFFICE --

-- BUT IMAGES OF LIZZIE INTRUDED AND WOULD NOT BE DENIED.

MY ONLY HOPE WAS TO ZERO IN ON THE BOTTLE OF SCOTCH IN THE LOWER RIGHT-HAND DRAWER OF MY DESK, LIKE A HOMING PIGEON NEARING A COOP.

I KEPT SEEING THE DIRT IN LIZZIE'S EYESOCKETS.

I IMAGINED HER EYES OPEN AS THE CLUMP OF DARK LOAM DROPPED TOWARD THEM, EVEN THOUGH I KNEW SHE WAS ALREADY DEAD WHEN SHE WAS BURIED.

FOR SOME REASON, THE MORBID VISION MADE ME THINK OF JOYCE'S KIDS: JENNIE AND TONY

IT MADE ME WISH I HADN'T GONE SO LONG WITHOUT SEEING THEM

WE GET TOO BUSY SOMETIMES WE CAN'T FIND THE TIME TO SEE THE PEOPLE WE CARE ABOUT.

THE WOMAN SITTING IN MY OFFICE WAS BARELY TWENTY. SHE'D JUST MISSED THE FLAPPER ERA.

FIVE YEARS OLDER AND HER COMBINATION OF DEFIANT BRIGHTNESS AND WEALTH WOULD HAVE BEEN SEDUCED BY THE LURE AND EASY ACCESSIBILITY OF THE SPEAKEASIES.

THE BRIGHTNESS AND DEFIANCE WOULD HAVE BEEN SQUANDERED.

SHE WORE A PRINTED LAWN DRESS WITH A CRISP WHITE ORGANDY BOW. HER BAG WAS COTTON TWINE WITH RICKRACK BRAID.

SHE HADN'T GOT IT FROM THE SALVATION ARMY.

MR. DUSK?

THAT'S THE NAME ON THE DOOR.

FLIK

AND THIS IS MY OFFICE

HOW'D YOU GET IN?

I PICKED YOUR LOCK WITH A BOBBY PIN
I'M GLAD I DIDN'T MOVE IN HERE FOR THE SECURITY
WHERE D YOU LEARN THAT LITTLE TRICK?
VASSAR
GOOD EDUCATION
LOTS OF US GIRLS USED TO SNEAK BACK INTO THE DORM AFTER HOURS.
A MRS MORRISON RECOMMENDED YOUR SERVICES.
AND I COULD HAVE SWORN SHE DIDN'T LIKE ME.
WHY SHOULDN'T SHE? WITH THE PICTURES YOU TOOK, SHE WAS ABLE TO SOAK THAT SCOUNDREL SHE HAD FOR A HUSBAND FOR A MINT
SHE TOOK IT HARD, AT FIRST, BUT AFTER THE COURT AWARDED HER A SUMPTUOUS ALIMONY, THE DIVORCE BECAME HEAVEN-SENT
ARE YOU HAVING HUSBAND TROUBLE? LET ME TELL YOU, I HAVEN'T THE STOMACH OR PATIENCE FOR AN ADULTERY CASE RIGHT NOW

OH, NO, VALENTINE AND I GET ALONG FINE
VALENTINE?
I'M MRS VALENTINE COOPER NEÉ AMANDA CLEMENT.
I'M HERE ABOUT MY FATHER.
I HOPE YOU DON'T MIND.
I NEED A DRINK.
LADY.. I SAW A LITTLE GIRL 8 YEARS OLD DUG UP OUT OF A GRAVE, DIRT IN HER HAIR AND EYES--
THAT'S NOT VERY... PROFESSIONAL, IS IT?
--DEAD FOR NO GOOD REASON, JUST DEAD'
GO TELL SOMEBODY ELSE WHAT'S PROFESSIONAL.
A LITTLE GIRL..
NEVER MIND.
IT'S NOT YOUR FAULT
SORRY I SNAPPED AT YOU.
CARE TO JOIN ME?
WHY NOT? MAYBE A DRINK WILL MAKE THIS EASIER.

SHE DID NOT ORDINARILY DRINK SCOTCH OUT OF GRIMY KITCHEN GLASSES. IT WAS HER WAY OF SHOWING ME SHE WAS NOT INTIMIDATED WHEN AWAY FROM THE SHELTER OF FAMILY AND GENTILITY.
BEFORE WE PROCEED ANY FURTHER, THERE IS ONE IMPORTANT REQUIREMENT WE HAVE TO SETTLE
WHICH IS?
I DON'T WANT YOU TO TELL ANYONE I'VE HIRED YOU
WELL... THAT'S INTRIGUING.
ANY INTRIGUING REASON WHY NOT? ASHAMED TO BE SEEN IN MY COMPANY?
CERTAINLY NOT
I HAVEN'T KNOWN YOU LONG ENOUGH TO KNOW WHETHER ONE SHOULD BE ASHAMED TO BE SEEN IN YOUR COMPANY.
ACTUALLY, IT'S NOT EVERYONE YOU HAVE TO KEEP MUM FROM, JUST MY MOTHER AND MY UNCLE JOHN
PRIVATE INVE
YOU'VE GOT SOME MOXIE, KID JUST WHAT IS IT YOU WANT ME TO DO?

GUARD MY FATHER.

FROM WHOM?

FROM WHOEVER'S TRYING TO KILL HIM.

WELL, THAT'S CURIOUS

WHY IS IT THE DAUGHTER, AND NOT THE MOTHER, WHO WANTS TO KNOW WHO'S TRYING TO KILL HIM?

BECAUSE MY MOTHER IS NO LONGER HIS WIFE, AND BECAUSE MANY A TIME SHE'S WISHED SHE HAD KILLED THE "OLD BASTARD."

THAT'S WHAT SHE CALLS HIM THESE DAYS.

YOU DON'T SEEM TO TAKE IT TOO BAD.

WOULDN'T CHANGE IT IF I DID.

IS YOUR MOTHER'S DESCRIPTION ACCURATE?

PARTLY. BUT FATHER HAS HIS ADMIRABLE SIDES AS WELL. HE'S WILLFUL. HE'S SELF-CENTERED. HE CAN BE AS COLD SOMETIMES AS THE ICEBERG THAT SANK THE TITANIC

BUT HE'S ALSO GOT DRIVE, PASSION; HE CAN BE EXTREMELY EXTRAVAGANT

HOW DOES YOUR FATHER MAKE HIS MILLIONS?

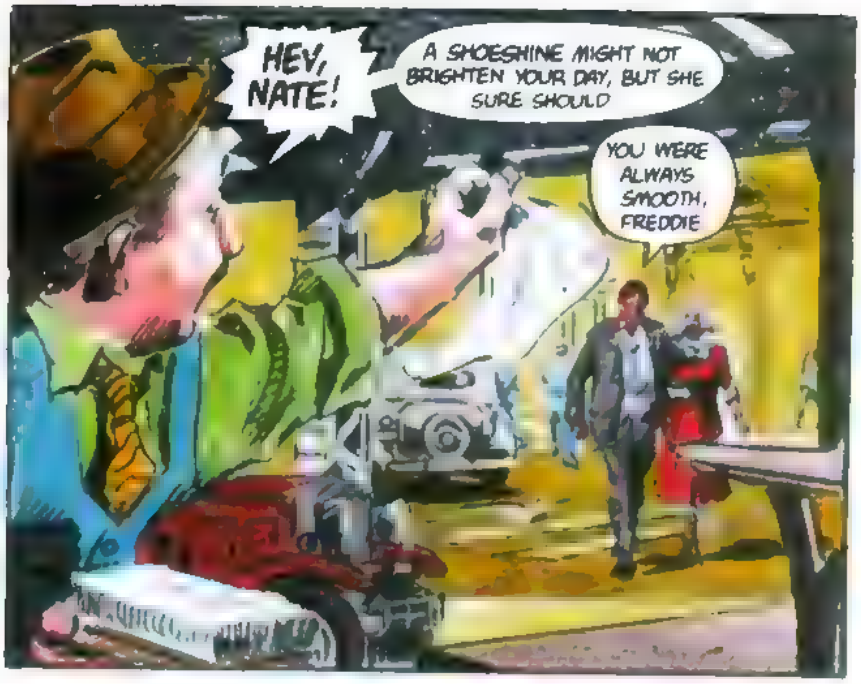
HE SELLS APPLES ON STREET CORNERS

:COUGH:

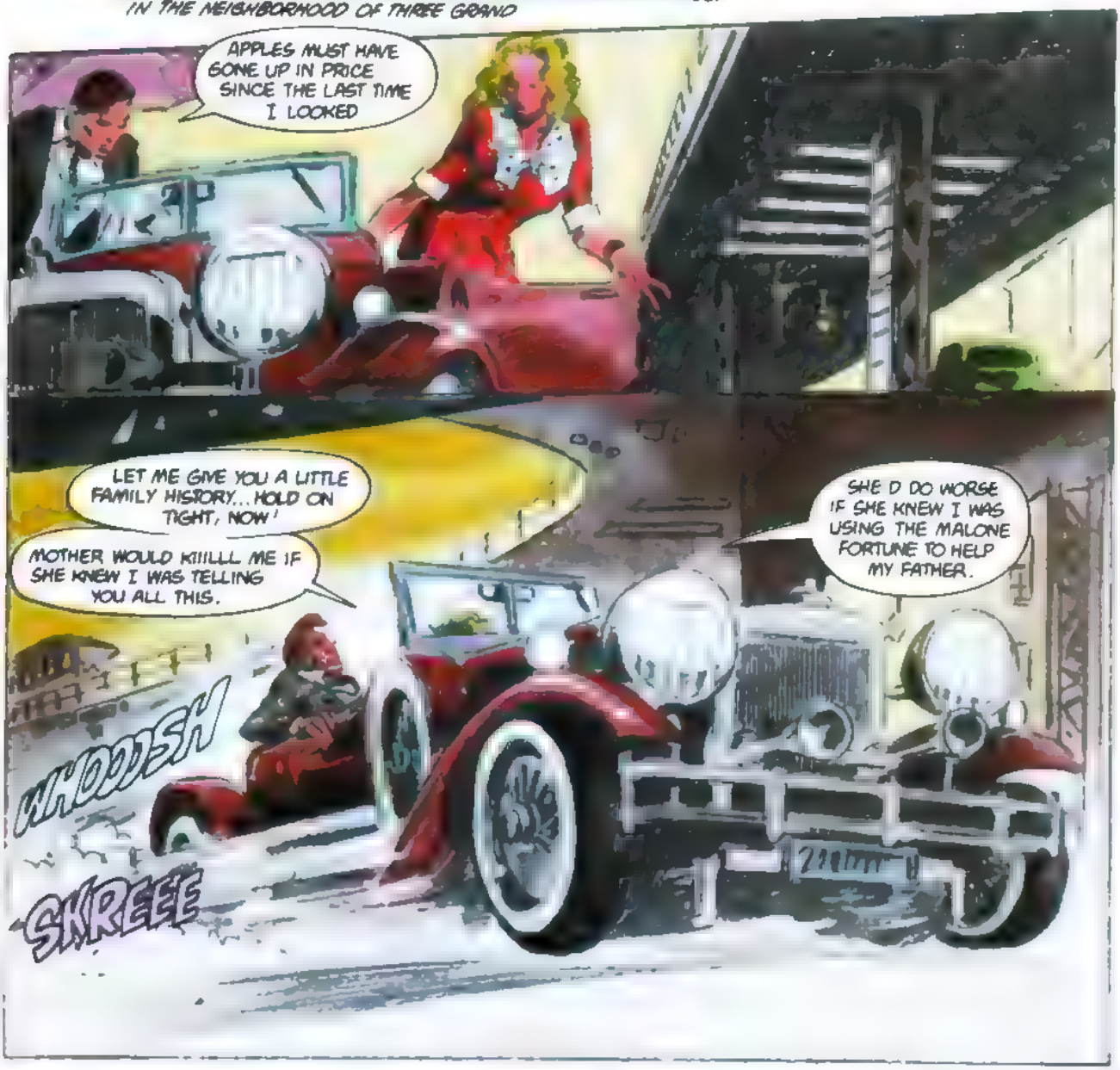
EXCUSE ME.

WHAT'D YOU SAY?

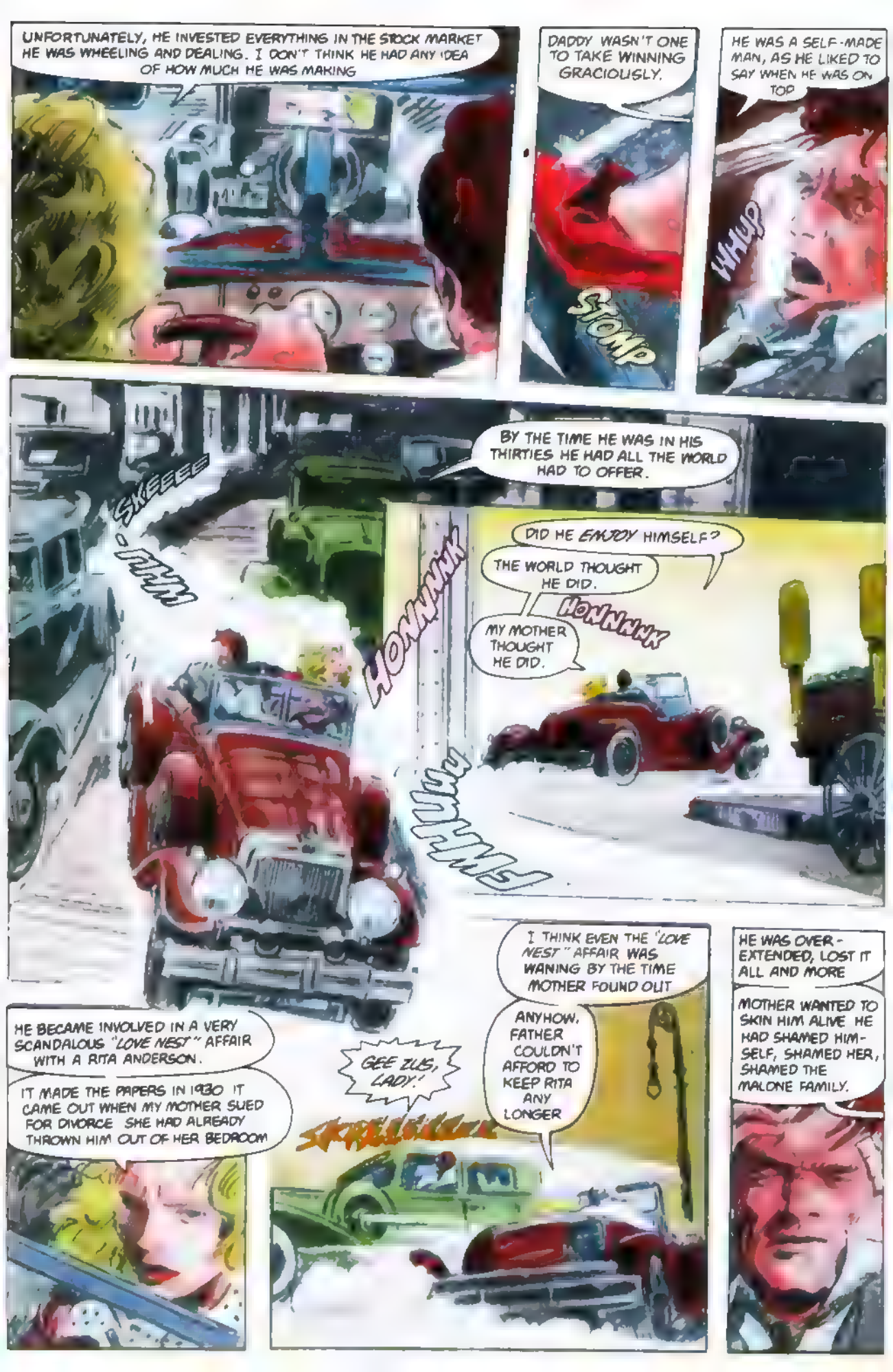
HE'S AN APPLE PEDDLER. YOU SEE THEM ALL OVER THE SIDEWALKS OF THE CITY APPLES IN BOXES, ALL POLISHED
TAKES A LOT OF APPLES TO BUY A HANDBAG LIKE THAT. HE MUST HAVE PICKED THE RIGHT CORNER.
KNOW WHERE THE HUNGRY UNICORN RESTAURANT IS? HE SETS HIS STAND THERE, NEAR ONE OF THOSE CHEAP FOOD AUTOMATS
COME ON, I'LL DRIVE YOU OVER SO YOU CAN MEET HIM
I HAVEN'T TAKEN THE CASE YET.
WELL...
YOU CAN TURN THE JOB DOWN JUST AS EASILY IN THE FRESH AIR AS YOU CAN IN HERE
SHE DIDN'T SAY THE AIR WASN'T FRESH IN THE OFFICE
SHE DIDN'T HAVE TO.



SHE DROVE A SMART-LOOKING 1931 STUTZ-BEARCAT THAT COST IN THE NEIGHBORHOOD OF THREE GRAND


APPLES MUST HAVE GONE UP IN PRICE SINCE THE LAST TIME I LOOKED
LET ME GIVE YOU A LITTLE FAMILY HISTORY... HOLD ON TIGHT, NOW!
MOTHER WOULD KIIILLL ME IF SHE KNEW I WAS TELLING YOU ALL THIS.
SHE'D DO WORSE IF SHE KNEW I WAS USING THE MALONE FORTUNE TO HELP MY FATHER.
WHOOOSH
SKREEEE

MY FATHER MARRIED INTO THE MALONE FAMILY. NONE OF MY RELATIVES WERE THRILLED BY MOTHER'S CHOICE IN HUSBANDS
HOW DID THE MALONES MAKE THEIR MILLIONS? NOT IN APPLES, I TRUST
SHE WAS A CITY DRIVER, QUICK WITH THE HORN, AND A SEVERE CASE OF AMNESIA WHERE BRAKES WERE CONCERNED.
RIBBONS, BELIEVE IT OR NOT. THERE WAS A THRIVING BUSINESS IN RIBBONS.
DADDY ACTUALLY HELPED EXPAND THE BUSINESS. HE WAS A REAL TYCOON. GOT CONTRACTS FOR RIBBONS WITH THE ELKS, ALL KINDS OF UNION BANQUETS, YOU NAME IT


UNFORTUNATELY, HE INVESTED EVERYTHING IN THE STOCK MARKET HE WAS WHEELING AND DEALING. I DON'T THINK HE HAD ANY IDEA OF HOW MUCH HE WAS MAKING
DADDY WASN'T ONE TO TAKE WINNING GRACIOUSLY.
STOMP
HE WAS A SELF-MADE MAN, AS HE LIKED TO SAY WHEN HE WAS ON TOP
WHUP
BY THE TIME HE WAS IN HIS THIRTIES HE HAD ALL THE WORLD HAD TO OFFER.
SKEEEE
DID HE ENJOY HIMSELF?
THE WORLD THOUGHT HE DID.
MY MOTHER THOUGHT HE DID.
HONNNK
HONNNK
HONNNK
HE BECAME INVOLVED IN A VERY SCANDALOUS "LOVE NEST" AFFAIR WITH A RITA ANDERSON.
IT MADE THE PAPERS IN 1930 IT CAME OUT WHEN MY MOTHER SUED FOR DIVORCE SHE HAD ALREADY THROWN HIM OUT OF HER BEDROOM
GEE ZUS, LADY!
I THINK EVEN THE "LOVE NEST" AFFAIR WAS WANING BY THE TIME MOTHER FOUND OUT
ANYHOW, FATHER COULDN'T AFFORD TO KEEP RITA ANY LONGER
HE WAS OVER-EXTENDED, LOST IT ALL AND MORE
MOTHER WANTED TO SKIN HIM ALIVE HE HAD SHAMED HIMSELF, SHAMED HER, SHAMED THE MALONE FAMILY.

THE RIBBON BUSINESS WAS SCRAMBLING TO STAY ALIVE
I DON'T THINK IT WAS THE FACT HE WAS MAKING WHOOPEE WITH ANOTHER WOMAN THAT MOTHER NEVER FORGAVE HIM FOR.
SHE NEVER FORGAVE HIM FOR GOING BANKRUPT.
AND WHEN MOTHER DIVORCED HIM, THE MALONE FAMILY DISOWNED HIM HIS CONTACTS AND FRIENDS HAD THEIR OWN PROBLEMS.
SO NOW.. HE SELLS APPLES
LET ME SEE IF I'VE GOT THIS STRAIGHT-- YOU'RE SAYING NOBODY TRIED TO KILL HIM WHEN HE WAS A WHEELER-DEALER ON WALL ST., A MAN WORTH A FORTUNE--
--BUT NOW THAT HE'S DOWN ON HIS LUCK, AND SELLING APPLES ON STREET CORNERS, SOMEBODY THINKS HE'S IMPORTANT ENOUGH TO MURDER
YOU WERE LISTENING'
WHOOPS!
IT'S BETTER THAN--
--WATCHING THE ROAD
TWO NIGHTS AGO, WHEN HE WAS COMING OUT OF HIS BOARDINGHOUSE, SOMEONE FROM THE ROOFTOP ACROSS THE WAY TOOK A SHOT AT HIM. HE SAYS THE DUMMY WAS A LOUSY SHOT. LUCKY FOR HIM HE WAS.
DOES HE KNOW WHO TOOK THE SHOT?
SPLASH
HE CLAIMS HE DOESN'T. ON THE OTHER HAND, I HAVEN'T ALWAYS KNOWN HIM TO TELL THE TRUTH EVEN TO ME... AND HE LIKES ME.
HE MAY BE BROKE, BUT HE WON'T ACCEPT CHARITY, EVEN FROM ME. HE'S STUBBORN, OPINIONATED, AND INDEPENDENT.
NOT THE BEST KIND OF MAN TO BODYGUARD

WHAT DO YOU MEAN?
AMANDA, THERE ISN'T ANY WAY TO SAFELY BODY-GUARD ANYONE WHO ISN'T HOLED UP SOMEWHERE OUT OF SIGHT.
IF A MAN REFUSES TO STOP HIS DAILY ROUTINE AND GOES ABOUT HIS BUSINESS, THEN ANYONE WHO REALLY WANTS HIM DEAD WILL HAVE DOZENS OF OPPORTUNITIES.
IT'S IMPOSSIBLE TO SAFEGUARD AGAINST ALL THE ROOFTOPS, ALLEYWAYS, PASSING AUTOS, ETC
WELL, IF THIS MAN IS REALLY AS BAD A SHOT AS MY FATHER CLAIMS, THEN YOU CAN GET THE MAN RESPONSIBLE IF HE DOES MAKE ANOTHER ATTEMPT
WHAT ELSE CAN I DO, MR DUSK?
HE WON'T STAY INDOORS FOR ME AND HE WON'T STAY INDOORS FOR YOU--
--UNLESS YOU BREAK BOTH HIS LEGS AND I'D RATHER NOT PAY YOU TO DO THAT
THERE WAS SOMETHING INFECTIOUS ABOUT MRS. VALENTINE COOPER NÉE AMANDA CLEMENT IT DIDN'T MAKE ME FORGET LIZZIE OR JOYCE, BUT FREDDIE WAS RIGHT.
SHE DID BRIGHTEN THE DAY.
HOW LONG DO YOU WANT ME TO TAG ALONG WITH HIM?
FOR HOWEVER LONG IT TAKES
IT COULD BE AWHILE
THIS IS MY FATHER'S LIFE WE'RE TALKING ABOUT
RIGHT OKAY DO YOU HAVE ANY IDEA WHO WOULD WANT HIM DEAD?

NO. I HARDLY SEE HIM THESE DAYS. I GET DOWN TO HIS HOVEL ABOUT ONCE A MONTH HE WON'T EVEN LET ME TAKE HIM OUT TO DINNER
HOW VIOLENT IS THE HATRED TOWARD YOUR FATHER AT THE FAMILY MANOR?
IT'S BEEN ABOUT FOUR YEARS, MR DUSK. THEY DON'T EVEN SPEAK ABOUT HIM ANYMORE MY UNCLE JOHN MALONE RUNS THE RIBBON BUSINESS THESE DAYS
VALENTINE... MY HUSBAND, REMEMBER WORKS NOW FOR UNCLE JOHN. UNCLE JOHN IS A TERRIBLE TASK MASTER, AND AN UNFORGIVING MAN
I THINK UNCLE JOHN TOOK GREAT GLEE IN MY FATHER'S COMEUPPANCE
HE PREFERS FATHER ALIVE TO SUFFER POVERTY
IT'S A FITTING PUNISHMENT AS FAR AS UNCLE JOHN S CONCERNED.
MY GUESS IS THE FAMILY IS MORE UPSET WITH ME THESE DAYS
LIKE MOTHER, LIKE DAUGHTER
VALENTINE IS A SELF-EDUCATED MAN, ALSO. HE ISN'T THE WHEELER-DEALER MY FATHER WAS, BUT HE HAS HIS OWN IDEAS AND PLANS
STILL . I GUESS UNCLE JOHN IS GROWING ACCUSTOMED TO VALENTINE
THEY DON'T LOVE EACH OTHER, BUT THEY'VE BEGUN TO TOLERATE EACH OTHER
HERE WE ARE!

CRANSTON CLEMENT'S FLESH HAD A GRAYISH TINGE, AS IF HE WERE RECOVERING FROM A LONG ILLNESS. BUT THERE WAS A RUTHLESS FIRE LEFT BURNING IN HIS EYES.

THEY DID NOT BEG.

THEY LOCKED PASSERSBY, HIS PROSPECTIVE WELL-OFF CUSTOMERS, SQUARE IN THE EYE, AND NEITHER GAVE NOR DEFERRED.

HE SMILED, A SMILE WITH GENUINE WARMTH. HIS FACE DID NOT LOOK LIKE A FACE USED TO SMILING
WHAT ARE YOU DOING SLUMMING DOWN THIS WAY?
NOT STILL WORRIED ABOUT YOUR OLD MAN, ARE YOU?

WHO'S YOUR BEAU?
HE'S NOT A BEAU REMEMBER, I TOLD YOU I WAS GOING TO LOOK FOR A PRIVATE INVESTIGATOR?
WHAT? A NURSEMAID? HE'LL SCARE BUSINESS AWAY
MAYBE I CAN STRONG-ARM CUSTOMERS FOR YOU. THAT'LL BE A NEW WRINKLE IN THE APPLE-SELLING BUSINESS.

I ALREADY GOT MY SIGN OF DISTINCTION MY SPIKED APPLE
MAKES PEOPLE REMEMBER MY STAND OVER THE NEXT GUY'S
HE MIGHT FORGET MY MUG, BUT NOT THE SPIKE
MORE WAYS THAN ONE, THAT APPLE'S A REMINDER THAT I'M GONNA BE ON MY WAY UP AGAIN. . AND APPLES ARE THE KEY OUT OF HERE.
LOOKS LIKE IT'D GO ROTTEN.
I SPLURGE EVERY COUPLA DAYS I GIVE MYSELF A NEW LUCKY APPLE
LISTEN, DAD, I'VE GOT TO BE TROTTING ALONG MOTHER WILL BE BESIDE HERSELF BY THE TIME I GET BACK.
OH...
IT'S MR DUSK WHO'S WATCHING OVER YOU.
PLEASE TRY YOUR BEST NOT TO MAKE HIM--
--HATE YOU TOTALLY.
Ta Ta!
SOME DAUGHTER.
YEH
YOU LOOK LIKE A MAN WHO KNOWS THE ROPES.
I'VE KNOCKED AROUND A BIT

THERE WAS A SICKNESS IN HIM, LIKE A DISEASE HE COULD NOT SHAKE.
THE PAIN LURKED IN HIS EYES, UNDER THEIR FIRE, AND IN THE FURROW ENGRAVED ACROSS HIS BROW, AND IN THE WAY HE MOVED, AS IF A CONSTANT ACHE RESIDED IN ALL HIS JOINTS.
LET ME TELL YOU, MR PRIVATE INVESTIGATOR--
--YOU GOT TO BE GODDAMNED STRONG TO SURVIVE LIFE.
YOU SEE THESE PEOPLE PASSING US BY.. TELL YOU SOMETHING, THEY'RE AFRAID OF YOU IF YOU'RE TOO STRONG. AND THEY LOOK DOWN ON YOU IF YOU'RE TOO WEAK.
YOU GET TOO WEAK, SOME OF THEM ARE GOING TO EAT THE MARROW FROM YOUR BONES--
--THEN THEY'LL LEAVE YOU TO ROT IN THE GODDAMNED GUTTER!

THAT'S WHAT THE PACK IS ABOUT, MR PRIVATE INVESTIGATOR.
YOUR DAUGHTER SAID YOU WERE A CHARMING FELLOW
LISTEN, I'LL TELL YOU THE TRUTH THE PACK IS ALL WANDERING AROUND, KIND OF AIMLESS AND BRUTISH--
--AND EVERY ONCE IN AWHILE THEY SENSE SOME WEAKNESS AND THEY COME IN AND TEAR A CHUNK OF MEAT OFF YOUR BODY--
--AND THEN YOU'RE WEAKER, BUT YOU BETTER NOT SHOW IT
YOU BETTER LOOK LIKE THE ATTACKS MAKE YOU EVEN STRONGER, OR THE NEXT THING YOU KNOW, THEY'LL BE FEEDING OFF YOUR CORPSE.'
I'M NO WEAK SISTER, NOT BY A LONG SHOT!
I'LL LET YOU TAG ALONG AFTER ME SO LONG AS YOU DON'T GET TO BE A NUISANCE AND SO LONG AS IT SERVES MY PURPOSE.
I'VE GOT A FEELING IT'S GOING TO BE A LOONG WEEKEND.

SUNDAY - JUNE 17, 1934

SUNDAY IS THE DAY FOR PAPERS IN MANHATTAN THE HERALD TRIBUNE THE NEWS THE TIMES. PAPER MOUNTAINS RISING FROM THE CONCRETE.
LIKE SOME ANCIENT RITUAL, PEOPLE SEEK OUT THE MOUNTAINS, WHETHER THEY ARE STAYING HOME OR PLANNING TO RIDE THE NEW BMT LINE OUT TO CONEY ISLAND

BUYING THE SUNDAY PAPERS IS PART OF THE DAY, LIKE EARLY MORNING CHURCH BELLS CALLING TO THEIR FLOCKS.

I LEFT CRANSTON IN HIS FLOP-HOUSE ROOM WITH THE THREE MAJOR SUNDAYS

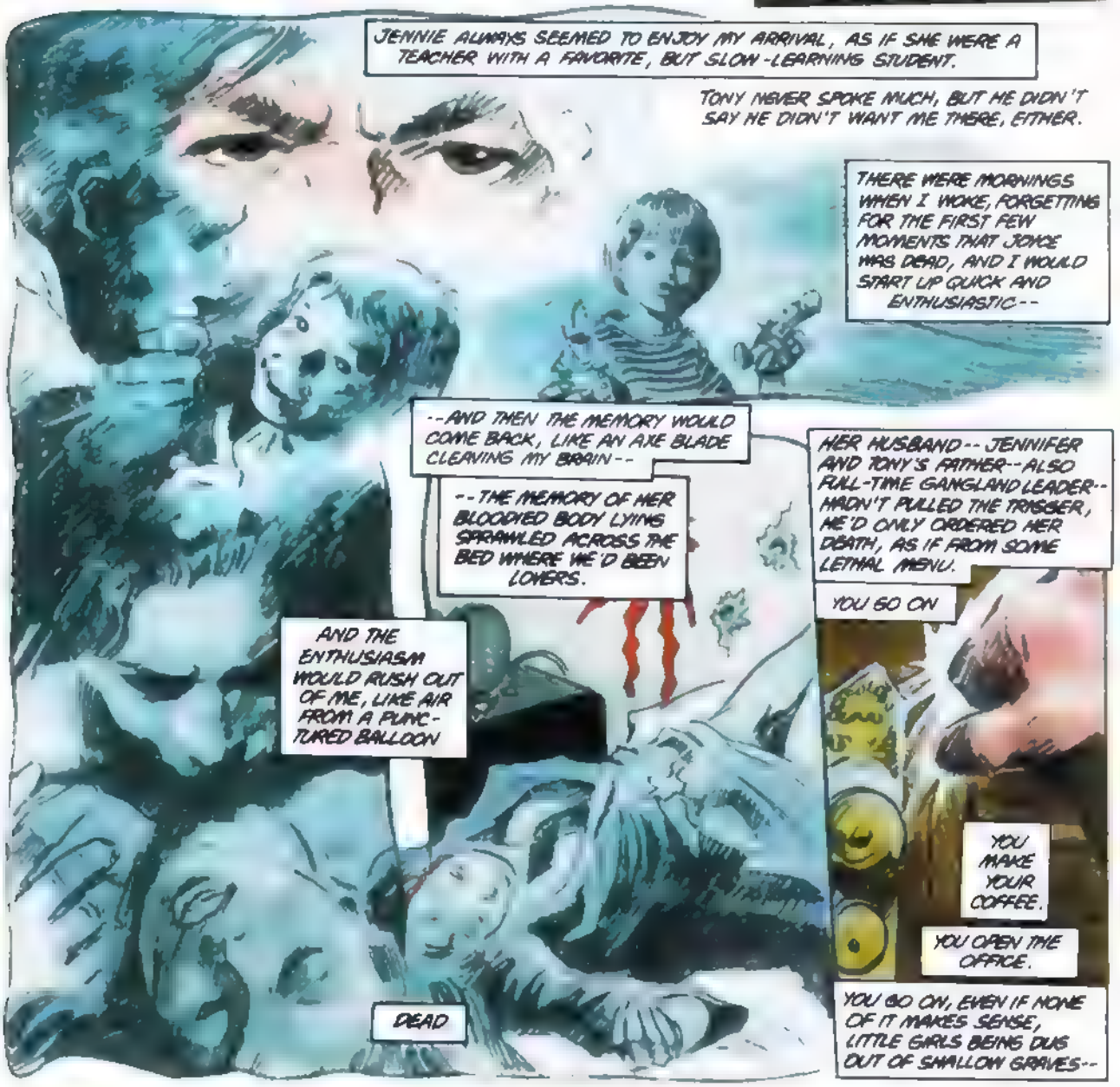
HE PROMISED HE WOULDN'T GO OUT

I FIGURED THE ODDS WERE ABOUT EVEN THAT HE WOULDN'T.

IN ITALIAN HARLEM, I HEARD THE DISTANT LAUGHTER OF CHILDREN COMING FROM A PLAYGROUND.

SQUEAKY SWINGS MADE A DISCORDANT CHORUS.
A BASKETBALL SLAMMED ON THE COURT, MAKING ECHOES LIKE A RICOCHETING BULLET.

I FOUND MYSELF LOOKING FORWARD TO SEEING JOYCE'S KIDS


JENNIE ALWAYS SEEMED TO ENJOY MY ARRIVAL, AS IF SHE WERE A TEACHER WITH A FAVORITE, BUT SLOW-LEARNING STUDENT.
TONY NEVER SPOKE MUCH, BUT HE DIDN'T SAY HE DIDN'T WANT ME THERE, EITHER.
THERE WERE MORNINGS WHEN I WOKE, FORGETTING FOR THE FIRST FEW MOMENTS THAT JOYCE WAS DEAD, AND I WOULD START UP QUICK AND ENTHUSIASTIC--
--AND THEN THE MEMORY WOULD COME BACK, LIKE AN AXE BLADE CLEAVING MY BRAIN--
--THE MEMORY OF HER BLOODIED BODY LYING SPRAWLED ACROSS THE BED WHERE WE'D BEEN LOVERS.
AND THE ENTHUSIASM WOULD RUSH OUT OF ME, LIKE AIR FROM A PUNCTURED BALLOON
DEAD
HER HUSBAND--JENNIFER AND TONY'S FATHER--ALSO FULL-TIME GANGLAND LEADER--HADN'T PULLED THE TRIGGER, HE'D ONLY ORDERED HER DEATH, AS IF FROM SOME LETHAL MENU.
YOU GO ON
YOU MAKE YOUR COFFEE.
YOU OPEN THE OFFICE.
YOU GO ON, EVEN IF NONE OF IT MAKES SENSE, LITTLE GIRLS BEING DUG OUT OF SHALLOW GRAVES--

--OR THE WOMAN YOU LOVE SHOT TO DEATH
MRS GULINO, JOYCE'S MOTHER, HAD COME BACK TO LIFE WHEN HER GRAND-CHILDREN CAME TO LIVE WITH HER IT WAS NEARLY SOME SORT OF RESURRECTION.
NOW HER HOUSEHOLD WAS NOT EMPTY NOW THERE WAS SOMETHING TO DO NOT JUST FOR HER, BUT FOR HER FAMILY SHE NO LONGER HAD THE DISTRACTED LOOK OF THE RECLUSE

JENNIE GULINO'S BROWN-AND-JADE EYES REMINDED ME OF HER MOTHER'S SHE WAS A CONNOISSEUR OF THE SUNDAY FUNNIES.

SOMETHING WRONG, MRS. GULINO?
YOU TALK TO TONY, YES, MR DUSK?
SURE WHERE IS HE?
IN THE PLAY YARD
YOU LOOK WORRIED. TONY DO SOMETHING?

A MAN .. MAYBE TONY LISTENS TO... AN OLD WOMAN... YOUNG BOYS, THEY DON'T LISTEN SO GOOD... THEY DON'T TALK SO MUCH TO AN OLD WOMAN.

BUT YOU... MAYBE YOU GET HIM TO SPEAK. TO SAY WHAT IT IS THAT EATS HIS HEART.
IT'S NO GOOD. HE MOPES AROUND
HE TALKS TO HIS TOY MEN

I SEE MUCH ANGER THERE. I'M HIS GRANDMA, AND I SEE THAT, AND IT HURTS THAT THERE IS NOTHING I CAN DO TO TAKE OUT THE POISON THAT EATS HIS SOUL.

SO I COME TO YOU
YOU WHO HAVE DONE SO MUCH ALREADY
I AM ASHAMED TO ASK... BUT FOR THE BOY I WOULD SUFFER EVEN SHAME.

THE MURAL PAINTED ON THE TENEMENT WALL FACING THE PLAYGROUND WAS CARTOONY AND SUNSHINY, WITH MOTHER GOOSE BRIGHT COLORS.
THERE WAS NO 90% HUMIDITY IN THAT GAUDY LANDSCAPE, NO SOOT-STAINED TENEMENTS, NO CRIES OF DESPAIR, NO ANGUISHED SILENCE.

HI, TONY.
'LO.
IT WAS AN ALIEN PLANET EVEN SIX-YEAR-OLDS GROWING UP IN THIS CRUMBLING CEMENT TERRAIN COULDN'T BELIEVE IN.

YOUR GRANDMA TELLS ME SHE DOESN'T THINK YOU'RE DOING SO GOOD.
WHAT'S WRONG?

NOTHIN'
LOOKS TO ME AS IF SHE'S RIGHT

I SAID, "NOTHING," DIDN'T I?
NOTHING, HUH? MEANING YOU DON'T WANT TO TALK ABOUT IT?

NUTHIN' TO TALK ABOUT
YOU SURE?
YUP.

WHAT HAVE YOU BEEN DOING LATELY?
NOTHIN'
WHAT DO YOU THINK ABOUT, TONY?

NOTH--
LET ME GUESS.
NOTHING.

TUESDAY-
JUNE 19, 1934
THE CITY WASN'T PREPARED FOR THE HURRICANE.
IT CAME UP FROM SAN SALVADOR, RIPPED ITS WAY OVER LOUISIANA, AND THEN MADE A SHARP DETOUR, AS IF IT HAD DECIDED IT WOULD TAKE IN NEW YORK CITY JUST FOR THE HELL OF IT.
THE FREAKISH WIND CAUGHT THE DISPLAY SIGN OVER THE HUNGRY UNICORN RESTAURANT--
--TOSSED IT VIOLENTLY, SO THAT THE METAL BEAST SEEMED TO RAGE AGAINST A TIME AND PLACE IN WHICH IT DID NOT BELONG.
HATS, WEEK-OLD NEWSPAPERS, GUTTER-DIRT, EVEN APPLES, WERE SWEPT UP IN THE GRAY GALE.
CRANSTON CLEMENT APPEARED TO RELISH THE BITTER WIND HURLED AT HIS FACE.
LET'S GET OFF THE STREETS
WEATHER'S GETTING ROUGH. WON'T BE WORTH OUR WHILE TO STAY OUT IN THIS
WE'LL GRAB A BITE AT THE AUTOMAT.

WE RELEASED SANDWICHES AND SLABS OF PIE FROM THEIR TINY PRISONS. I WONDERED IF CRANSTON EVER FELT TRAPPED, IMPRISONED IN A CASE OF POVERTY.
IT BOTHER YOU MUCH, THE WAY THE MALONE FAMILY GAVE YOU THE AIR?
HAH! THOSE BUMS! THAT BROTHER OF MY EX-WIFE'S... OLD JOHN MALONE. . YOU EVER MEET HIM?
NO.
OLD JOHN IS UPRIGHT. STEADFAST! A REAL PAIN IN THE KIESTER!
I'LL TELL YOU, THEY ALL FORGOT MY MUG TEN MINUTES AFTER I WAS OUT OF THERE.
EVEN THE PLANT FOREMAN, GANNON MCALISTER, WIPED HIS MEMORY CLEAN BEST WAY TO BE ABOUT SOMEONE WHO'S PULLED A BONER!
JUST THE OTHER DAY, ONE OF THE MALONE CLAN PASSED ME BY, THIS CLOSE, NO KIDDING!
HE DIDN'T EVEN SEE ME. WALKED RIGHT ON BY, NEVER NOTICED. BUT I'LL BET HE WISHES HE HAD.
TO GLOAT?

YEAH WHATEVER.
LET ME TELL YOU SOMETHING, NATHAN
MONEY'S EVERYTHING
IT'S POWER
IT'S LOVE
IT'S RESPECT.
DON'T LET ANYBODY GIVE YOU ANY PHONY BALONEY.
THAT'S WHAT IT'S REALLY ABOUT IN THIS COUNTRY. YOU DON'T GOT MONEY--
YOU DON'T GOT SUCCESS--
YOU GOT ZILCH
YOU GOT SCORN OR PITY IN THEIR EYES YOU'RE NOT A GODDAMNED MAN ANYMORE IN THE EYES OF OTHER MEN, AND ESPECIALLY IN THE EYES OF WOMEN.
IT ISN'T WHAT'S BETWEEN YOUR LEGS THEY RESPECT IT'S WHAT YOU'VE GOT IN YOUR WALLET
YOU'VE MET THE WRONG KIND OF WOMEN, THEN.
I KNEW A WOMAN WASN'T LIKE THAT AT ALL
MY REPLY WAS A TOKEN RESISTANCE TO HIS VIEWPOINT.
I'D LISTENED TO ENOUGH PEOPLE OVER THE YEARS TO KNOW YOU DON'T CHANGE THEIR VIEWS OR DISTORTED PHILOSOPHIES BY CHALLENGING THEM HEAD-ON.
YOU ONLY END UP IN AN ARGUMENT OR WITH A SPLITTING HEADACHE.
I DON'T BUY IT ONLY WOMAN I KNOW LIKE THAT IS AMANDA

AMANDA'S ONE OF A KIND. HER OLD MAN GOES BUST, DISGRACES HIMSELF, HIS FAMILY, AND THE DAMNED KID IS STILL THERE.
NO SCORN IN HER EYES. NO HATE. MOST OF ALL... NO PITY.
THAT WAS WHAT RITA HAD FOR ME...
PITY.
WHO COULD LOOK AT THAT 24 HOURS A DAY?
BUT WITH AMANDA, IT WAS, "I LOVE YOU, DADDY, FAILURE AND ALL."
GEEZ, THAT KID SLAYS ME.
CRANSTON COULD NOT BELIEVE IN HIS OWN DAUGHTER BECAUSE HE AGREED WITH THOSE WHO MEASURED A MAN AND HUMAN LIFE BY THEIR ABILITY TO EARN A BUCK. IT'S A SIMPLE VIEW OF LIFE, BUT ALSO A HARSH INDICTMENT FOR THOSE CONDEMNED TO LIVE BY IT.

I WAS WATCHING THE UNICORN TWIST ABOUT ON ITS CHAINS. TEARS WEPT ACROSS THE WINDOWPANE.
I WAS THINKING OF UNICORNS AND GREENBACKS WHEN I SAW THE MAN.
I COULD BARELY MAKE OUT THE GUN. IT WAS A SMALL SHADOW IN OUTSTRETCHED HANDS.
BUT I KNEW WHAT IT WAS!
AND I KNEW CRANSTON'S SKULL WAS THE TARGET!
COFFEE SPLASHED
PIE INNARDS SQUISHED LIKE A CATERPILLAR'S GUTS UNDER A YOUNG BOY'S FINGERS
CRANSTON LOOKED AT ME AS IF HE THOUGHT I'D GONE CRAZY, EVEN WHEN THE BULLET SHATTERED THE WEEPING GLASS.
THE GLASS SCARED ME AS MUCH AS THE BULLET.
SKRASS
BULLETS ARE MEANT TO HURT; THERE IS A SENSE OF COMPLETION IF THEY FULFILL THEIR POTENTIAL.
BUT A SHARD OF GLASS CAN KILL YOU AS QUICK, WITH A SLICE ACROSS AN ARTERY THAT SPEWS BLOOD LIKE A MINIATURE RED GEYSER.
THERE IS NO INEVITABILITY ABOUT DYING FROM A THIN EDGE OF GLASS, ONLY A SENSE OF RANDOM LUDICROUSNESS.

HURRICANE WINDS SWEPT INTO THE AUTOMAT LIKE THEY OWNED THE PLACE
I WAS ALREADY BREATHING RAGGEDLY BEFORE I RAN AGAINST THE WIND --
-- BEFORE I LEAPT OUT INTO THE DARK STORM.
THE GUNMAN STOOD AWKWARDLY AS IF HE DID NOT KNOW WHAT TO DO SINCE HIS ONE SHOT HAD FAILED.
HE STILL HAD THE GUN, BUT HE DIDN'T FIRE IT. MAYBE HE THOUGHT IT ONLY HAD THE POWER OVER LIFE ON CRANSTON. THEN AGAIN, WHO KNEW WHAT THE HELL HE THOUGHT!
NOW THAT HE HAD SOME SHOW OF RESISTANCE AND NOT JUST THE BACK OF A MAN'S SCALP IN HIS GUNSIGHTS, HE TURNED AND RAN.
MY HANDS STARTED TO SLIP ON THE WET CAR HOOD, BUT I MANAGED TO GET ENOUGH HEIGHT AND MOMENTUM TO REACH HIM AND BRING HIM DOWN. HE HIT ON HIS KNEES. THE IMPACT WOULDN'T HURT AS MUCH AS A BULLET, BUT I KNEW THE BASTARD FELT IT!

HE TWISTED AND TURNED BENEATH ME. HE REACHED FOR THE GUN DESPERATELY. THE WIND FILLED THE CITY NIGHT, BUT I THOUGHT I HEARD HIM WHIMPER.

I DID MY DAMNED-EST TO STOP HIM FROM GETTING THE GUN, BUT MY DAMNEDEST WASN'T ENOUGH.

IT WENT OFF NEAR MY FACE. I COULDN'T HEAR THE STORM I COULDN'T HEAR HIM WHIMPER.

I COULDN'T HEAR MY OWN WHIMPERING, BUT I KNEW I HAD.

I DIDN'T HEAR THE BULLET HIT.

IT WOULDN'T HAVE MATTERED IF I HAD, THE SUPPORT CHAIN FOR THE UNICORN WOULD STILL HAVE SNAPPED.

CRANSTON'S WOULD-BE ASSASSIN STILL SQUIRMED BENEATH ME, A MOVING BUNDLE OF WET CLOTHES.

I CONCENTRATED ON HOLDING ONTO HIS GUN HAND, BUT THERE WAS A PART OF ME AWARE OF THE DARK MASS ABOVE US.

THE MAN WENT INTO TOTAL PANIC, SCREAMING INSANELY, ARMS FLAILING, GUN BUTT STRIKING MY WRIST. THE FINGERS ON MY RIGHT HAND WENT NUMB.
ME SWUNG TEN, TWENTY TIMES, I LOST COUNT, BUT HE SCORED AT HIT AT LEAST HALF THE TIME--
--WHICH WAS WAY TOO MANY I STAINED HIS GUN BUTT WITH MY BLOOD.
I WANTED TO REST AGAINST THE CAR AT MY BACK.
I HAD NO DESIRE TO PURSUE HIM FURTHER.
MAYBE I WOULD SLEEP HERE.
AND THEN HE WAS FREE OF ME I DIDN'T KNOW WHO WAS MORE RELIEVED. . HIM, OR ME
I SAW THE UNICORN HORN IT DIDN'T SEEM TO BE PART OF ANY FANTASY. IT WAS SHARPENED-METAL REAL
MY BLOOD RACED WITH A NEW THOUGHT: MAYBE I WOULD DIE HERE!

WILL • THE • REAL • NICE • BUT DIFFICULT • GUY • PLEASE • STAND • UP

BY DON MCGREGOR

An artist friend of mine recently told me that I had a reputation for being, quote, "difficult."

Now, since it has not been uncommon over the years for some folks to compare me with my fictional creations, I thought, "Who could they be talking about? Couldn't be me, I don't think. Maybe they were talking about Nathaniel Dusk."

Actually, what the artist *really* said was, "They say you're a nice guy but difficult." His revealing this to me was a cautionary act. Be warned, so to speak.

Hmmmm.

Where do these basic one-liner personality summations and/or judgments come from?

Damned if I know. In fact, over the years, I have heard so many different, conflicting statements on who and what I am as a human being and writer that these days all I do is nod my head and murmur, "Hmmm." It seems as good a response as any.

As well as one-liner personality summations, there are also questions you are asked time and again. The proverbial writer's question, without question, is, "Where do you get your ideas?" But a second runner-up for most persistent query is, "What are your work habits?"

After all these years of working as a writer, you think I'd have an answer for that one, that I would have evolved some type of consistent format, a routine of the day. You know, so many hours behind the typewriter here, so much time allocated for answering correspondence, a structured system adhered to day in and day out.

But my life has never had a neat, orderly day-to-day fashion. Well, that's not quite true. There is one exception. I try to start the day with a large cup of coffee while watching an hour of one of my favorite television series from the past, on videotape, like *I Spy*, *The Avengers*, or *The Prisoner*. Some time with old friends, before the day starts to go berserk. I'd watch a movie, if I had the time, but most days that just isn't feasible.

Actually, each story seems to dictate its own method of execution. Writing NATHANIEL DUSK is much different from writing the futuristic shenanigans of *Sabre*, which I do for Eclipse comics. Both require research time, but different types of research.

Take NATHANIEL DUSK 2, "Apple Peddlers Die At Noon," for example.

Now, when I wrote the first mini-series, there was no assurance that there was going to be a second volume. After all, this was not a medium noted for a large survival rate for private eyes.

Nevertheless, while I was working on the first book, the idea for a second novel came to me. It's almost as if subconsciously you have tapped into the characters' lives and there is a flash of knowledge of what might happen to them next.

While I was researching the 30s for the first series, I came across one of Berenice Abbott's photographs of men standing on streetcorners selling apples in Depression-era New York City. This was a method for some men to earn a few pennies in a time when hamburgers were 5¢, but there were thousands who didn't have a nickel. Put that in your Big Mac and eat it.

Anyhow, this crazy title, "Apple Peddlers Die At Noon," came to me when I saw that picture, and a vague idea. Suppose a Wall Street wheeler-dealer worth a fortune lost it all in the Stock Market crash of 1929 and was reduced to hawking apples on New York's sidewalks, a situation, incidentally, that was not without precedence. But further, suppose that now that he was down-and-out, somebody decided he was important enough to murder!

A tantalyzing premise, I thought. Of course, I didn't have the faintest idea why somebody might want to put him in the morgue, but if DC ever gave Gene Colan and I the chance to chronicle more of Dusk's life, I could give the puzzle further thought.

Now, the first DUSK mini-series was not a mega-seller. Let's not let this piece descend into a standardized hype box, but the book did something that some people weren't sure a private eye book could do.

It didn't die.

If DUSK didn't open with sales as strong as some might have hoped, the series did manage to do one thing that some other mini-series along the way hadn't done. First issues of comics are always higher in sales than following issues. Distributors and store owners normally order more copies of a first issue, since many people out there in comic-book-buying land buy these books just as a collector's investment, so no matter what the first issue is, they take a copy of it.

Quite often, the percentage of sales drops from the first to second issue. This happened with NATHANIEL DUSK, but the percentage of its droppage in orders was not as high as it had been for some other titles, during a time period when there was a particularly heavy onslaught of comic books on the store racks. Sales stabilized for the remaining three issues, and that meant that there was an audience out there that would support a series about a private eye.

With the faith of Dick Giordano and Bruce Bristow, DC's marketing director, Gene and I received the word some six months later that we would get the chance to do DUSK again.

It's not often that a comic book writer can afford to take the time to walk the streets of New York, visit antique card shops, museums, libraries, all like an investigator in the middle of a lengthy case.

I love the fact that DUSK wasn't scheduled until we had actually come close to completing this book. That meant that I could take more than two months of research time, putting the book together structurally, trying to assure for time-period authenticity.

I thank Dick, Bruce, and Pat Bastienne for having the faith in me to let me voucher for some of those pages before I actually wrote them, while I was still pursuing the data that would eventually shape the material itself.

After the first book had been released, I received an unusual amount of mail from readers for a book that had not asked for any letters and wasn't apparently ever going to have a letters page. Some of them were particularly astute on the era of the 30s. And some of them were quick to point out some of the errors that I had made.

Harlan Ellison took the time out of his busy schedule to call and tell me a few of the anachronisms I had made, his attention to "Gunsel" being one of the most glaring. When Dashiel Hammett used the term in *The Maltese Falcon*, he had used it accurately, but other Hollywood writers, like Ben Hecht in *The Front Page*, Archie Goodwin informed me, used it incorrectly, thinking Hammett had meant the term as a "hired gun."

Okay, so you won't find the term "Gunsel" used in this second series. I'm sure I made some other bone-headed mistake, somewhere along the way, but I was out on the New York City streets diligently trying to make sure I didn't make too many of them.

I received a perceptive letter from Phil Normand, who was quite knowledgeable about 30s terminology. I wrote Phil back and asked him if he would care to read over the script I was writing for Gene and check it for accuracy. He kindly responded to the affirmative and he gave me a rundown on terms he felt could be changed, and offered a running commentary. However, if there are mistakes made in this book, don't blame Phil. There was not time for me to send him a finished copy of the script after it had been drawn, so any mistakes that might have gotten in here are mine alone. He's absolved of all blame. And I thank him dearly for his time and effort in helping me try to make this book as accurate as possible.

When the first series was completed, I sent the books to a number of the mystery writers currently producing some of the best private eye fiction. I knew I could not depend on the comic fanzines for unbiased reviews; they have already made their judgments of my work, Gene's work, a long time ago, and they seldom have the capability of taking a look at new work and criticizing it without all the fixed ideas they have from the past. Plus, you can never tell when political factors will enter into a situation and ensure that you will receive bad notices no matter what you do. Both Gene and I were treated with such kind enthusiasm by the private eye writers community, many of whom hadn't read a comic in years. I want to thank them for their support of the series and the warmth and cordiality they gave to Gene and I.

All of this was fine, well, and good, but it had nothing to do with producing a second series, which was of primary importance as of May 1984. Now I needed to come up with a reason why someone would want to fill an apple peddler full of lead. More important than that, though, was finding something that I wanted to write about, that would give the book weight and intent, as well as theme, and justify the time and effort (for *me*, you understand) that the book would require.

I read a quote from a book by C. Wright Mills from a book called *The Power Elite*. You see it reprinted on the inside front cover of this book along with the dedications. Let me say, mildly, since everyone must know that if I am a "nice but difficult" guy, I am also a "mellow" one. Let's just say I reacted a little bit to that statement. Let's say I decided that I would use that thesis as the springboard for "Apple Peddlers Die At Noon." I knew this was something I would not get bored writing about. This also seemed a natural theme for a Dusk novel, since he is a man who has lived in direct opposition to such philosophy or sentiment. So, now, even if I didn't know why someone wanted to kill an apple peddler, I knew that this book would be about the various ways people go about in the pursuit of the buck, the price it can cost them, and how it affects the quality of our everyday lives.

So I began traveling around Manhattan, scouting out material. My good buddy Dean Mullaney recommended a card shop down in the Village that had 30s memorabilia. I saw this fantastic postcard that displayed a fabulous-looking Switzerland Alpine ride, with sculptured mountains out of a Disney cartoon. They used the first air conditioners in America at the top of this ride so that customers would feel the cold air. It looks fabulous! I'd love to have a sequence take place on this ride, it would have such visual potential.

It was Coney Island that was the bitch to get accurately. Specifically Coney Island circa 1934.

And I could not use the Alpine ride. You see, unfortunately, Coney Island burned down a number of times between 1900 (which was when the Alpine ride had existed) and 1934. Most of the photos one could find for Coney Island after the late 1800s were from after the World's Fair of 1939.

So, where to go next. Nathan wouldn't give up, "nice but difficult guy" that he is, would he? Not on his life! Well, the least I could do was trudge around Manhattan some more.

I also began considering the other characters. A murder mystery needs suspects, but they must be more than that, they must have a flesh-and-blood history of their own.

The new characters weren't the only ones to consider. What about the people who had already been established as being a part of Nathan's world? How had their lives changed in the intervening months between February and June? I started to project what might happen between Nathan and Joyce's kids, Jennie and Tony, now that she was dead. I thought further about Lt. Murray Abrahams and his wife, Becky. I hadn't given much attention to Freddie Bickenhacker, the shoeshine man, the first time around. I wanted him to have more exposure in the new story line. And what about Oscar Flam, the newsstand dealer who had ratted on Dusk to the mob? What would their relationship be like these days? Sure. It would have been easier to forget many of these characters. It's done all the time on weekly television series, as last week's guest stars, old loves and friends, are conveniently forgotten. I did not want to abandon them, to do so would make Dusk's world inconsistent. I wanted his life to evolve. And if I wanted to do that, it meant I would have to take the time and trouble to figure out what had happened to all of them.

After I wrote this first issue, which you hold in your hands, I told Dick I needed more room, especially since I wanted to have this book be more of a whodunnit than the first. I had written this issue as a 30-page installment, so I asked him if we could make "Peddlers" a six-issue mini-series. He and

Bruce suggested a 4-issue series, but with 48 pages of story in each issue. *Yippee!* That's one of my childhood expressions suddenly leaping to the fore. I restructured this issue to give Gene more room, and went to work.

And it was odd. While I was working on "Peddlers," this new title came to me: "Hookers Die At Midnight." I couldn't pursue it right then; who knew if there was going to be a third series of DUSK books. That would be determined by you, the reader, and your response to our new efforts Well, that, and if DUSK manages to live through this story line, which isn't totally assured at this point. I mean, who knows if he'll even make it through the second issue.

He looks like a goner already!

But he's got some great people behind him. First and foremost, of course, is Gene Colan, my compadre, who keeps in touch through the progress of the book, and brings it to life, and makes that spark light up in me—the spark that has been there since I was five and saw my first comic on the racks. He's done it with *Ragamuffins*, and he does it with DUSK. He captures those places, but most important, those people; he gives you a subtlety of expression and range of emotions that you will seldom find anywhere else in this medium. Gene, I've said it before, but I'm going to say it again, "It's a privilege to work with you. I thank you for your effort and talent and friendship."

So, the book was well on its way to becoming reality. I had the artist I wanted, the room I needed to pursue the project in the fashion that I felt would be most effective. But comics are not done with writing and artwork alone. One of the most overlooked on the creative staff in this medium is the letterer. I wanted John Costanza. John Costanza, when it comes to lettering, his name is magical.

So, I went to Pat Bastienne and I asked for John. I'm not sure if I begged on bended knee. If it would have helped me get Pat to okay John for the book, I would have, though.

The other neat thing about John Costanza is, besides being a letterer whose lettering is so neat and crisp, with balloons that merge with the artwork and never fight it, is that he's one of the nicest guys around. I always enjoy meeting him at the DC Christmas parties. John, a tip of the old hat, as they say, from me to you.

As I write this, it has just been decided that Tom Ziuko will be coloring the book. And make no mistake, this is a prime factor in the producing of any comic book. I've only seen some of Tom's samples for the book, as I write this, but we will be talking shortly about the direction the coloring should take. Thomas, welcome aboard!

You've seen Barbara Randall's name somewhere on this book, probably the inside front cover. She was my liaison at DC to help coordinate the book, to let me know where it was at various times, what was due, making sure things got to where they should. She did it all with efficiency, especially when I got sick toward the production time of the book, and couldn't get into the offices as much as I would have liked.

And I can't ever write one of these DC columns without thanking Alice Schuler, Dick's assistant, because she always puts up with my calls, never complains, and she surely could say it was me and not Nathan who was the "nice but difficult guy."

For those interested in this sort of thing, below is a partial reference list of sources used for this series. When I was at the 42nd St. branch of the New York Library, one of the librarians looked at me with surprised eyes and asked incredulously, "You're doing all this for a comic book[" You can play the tone of voice for "comic book" in your own head. If you read them, and you're over 16, you've heard somebody use the tone of voice before.

Anyhow, some of the sources...

Brooklyn—And How It Got That Way by David W. McCullough, The Dial Press

The Museum of History of New York at 103rd and 5th Ave.

The Historical Society on Central Park West

New York Library, 42nd St. Branch and 44th St. Annex, micro film and micro fiches files

The New York Times

The *Daily News*

The Timetables of History by Grun, Simon Schuster

Cars of the 30s, published by Beckman House

The Desperate Years by James D. Horan, Bonanza

Muray's Celebrity Portraits of the Twenties and Thirties by Nikolas Muray, Dover Press

Berenice Abbott's fabulous photographic documents of *New York in the Thirties*, Dover Press

New York Then and Now by Edward B. Watson and Edmund V. Gillon, Jr., Dover Press

Dictionary of American Slang by Wentworth and Flexner, Crowell Press

That about wraps it up, gang. By now, you've probably figured out who the "difficult but nice" guy is.

Personally, I think it's Nathan, but don't tell him I said so.

And if enough of you write in to DC and Gene and I, and more important, if enough of you pick up this book and buy it, we'll get a chance to see if a title like "Hookers Die At Midnight" can survive.

Should be interesting, huh?

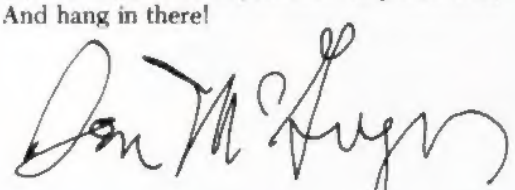
That is, if that "difficult but nice guy" Nathan doesn't get himself killed before "Apple Peddlers" ends.

As a writer, I never trust myself.

Anyhow, per the usual closing...

Be kind to each other, be kind to yourselves.

And hang in there!



—Don McGregor

April 1985

NATHANIEL DUSK II

Don McGregor

Gene Colan

Photo Albert Ecksman

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"Nathaniel Dusk is a smash

and deserves to be, because, as an insider in this game, I know how remorselessly you must have worked this over and over to make a story in this medium look simple. A story in any medium, but this one in particular.
"Will you be using Dusk in novels? He's a natural for it. I think what you've created here is a character who's splendidly traditional yet completely new."

Peter O'Donnell
Author, Modesty Blaise Series

"I think [*Nathaniel Dusk*] is terrific. Gene Colan's artwork is inspired, evoking the period without duplicating the style of early comics. It blends the feeling for the old with the awareness of the new—*noir* angles, abrupt close-ups.
"As far as I am concerned, Nathaniel now shares a space in my esteem with The Spirit."

Stuart M. Kaminsky
Author, Toby Peters Mysteries

"Dusk is a good character and I hope the comic is successful. Nice tone and use of style to the story line; good artwork with an effectively blurred, shadowed *noir* look to it. What more could anyone ask for in a PI comic? I'll be watching for future issues."

Bill Pronzini
Author, The Nameless Detective Series

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